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S E C R E T SECTION 01 F 03 BEIRUT 001568

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA  
ALSO FOR IO A/S HOOK AND PDAS WARLICK  
USUN FOR KHALILZAD/WOLFF/SCHEDLBAUER  
NSC FOR ABRAMS/RAMCHAND/YERGER/MCDERMOTT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/02/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [UNSC](#) [ECON](#) [LE](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: HARIRI TELLS A/S HOOK HE MET NASRALLAH  
TO KEEP LID ON SUNNI-SHIA TENSION

REF: A. BEIRUT 1541

[B](#). BEIRUT 1554

[C](#). BEIRUT 1557

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#). (S) Majority Leader Saad Hariri stressed to Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs Brian Hook the importance of building Lebanese state institutions and improving the Lebanese economy to counter Hizballah's influence. He said the calmer political situation following a series of reconciliation meetings among Lebanese political leaders would benefit March 14 in the 2009 parliamentary elections, and expressed his support for international election observers and media coming to Lebanon to cover the event. Hariri hoped his October 26 meeting with Hizballah SYG Hassan Nasrallah would allow him to reach out to Lebanese Shia. He harshly criticized the Syrian regime, and expressed satisfaction with reports of a October 26 U.S. raid across the Iraqi border into Syria, saying it "should have come sooner."

[2](#). (S) Hariri suggested that once new American and Israeli governments were in place, the time might be right to push for implementation of the 1949 armistice agreement between Israel and Lebanon. He termed UNIFIL a "hostage" to Hizballah, Syria, and Iran, and called for stronger action against Syrian arms smuggling to Hizballah. Hariri approved of what he called UNIIIC Commissioner Daniel Bellemare's "secretive" approach to his investigation of the assassination of Hariri's father Rafiq and other political assassinations. End summary.

COUNTERING HIZBALLAH:  
BUILDING A STATE AND AN ECONOMY

[3](#). (C) Visiting IO A/S Brian Hook and the Ambassador met with Majority Leader Saad Hariri October 30 at Qoreitem. Hariri political advisor Nader Hariri, press advisor Nadine Chehab, as well as IO Special Assistant Erin McLinn and PolOffs, also attended the meeting. A/S Hook began the meeting by assuring Hariri of the broad support for Lebanon across the American political spectrum, as we look to the coming elections. Hariri said that was good news, particularly since Lebanon faces its own elections in spring 2009. Hariri said the

March 14 alliance could win a parliamentary majority in those elections "if we play it well," but noted that even with a majority, it would not be allowed to rule completely, because Hizballah, with Syrian and Iran behind it, will not permit it.

14. (C) Hariri said Hizballah proved in May that it is willing to take Lebanon into a civil war if it does not get its way. The only way to counter it, he claimed, is to strengthen state institutions, encourage investment, and create jobs, so people do not rely on Hizballah's support. In particular, he said, it is crucial to build up the capabilities of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and the Internal Security Forces (ISF) as a counterweight to Hizballah's arms.

15. (C) The Ambassador commented that the elections will be hard-fought in several disputed Christian districts. Hariri said he was confident that after the political reconciliations of recent week, March 14 will not have problems in the elections. "We all sacrifice for each other," he said. He enthusiastically endorsed the idea of having international election observers from as many countries and institutions as possible, and said he hoped there would be a large international media presence as well.

#### HARIRI-NASRALLAH MEETING

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16. (C) In response to the Ambassador's query, Hariri described his October 26 meeting with Hizballah SYG Hassan Nasrallah. Hariri said he told Nasrallah that the two of

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them are the only ones who can keep a lid on Sunni-Shia conflict. Hariri quoted himself, "I told him, 'In Iraq, there are Sunnis killing Shia and Shia killing Sunnis, but there you have the American presence and other factors affecting the level of violence. Here, it is you and me. If we fight, then the whole country explodes.'"

17. (S) Hariri claimed that Nasrallah needed the meeting more than he did, because of the criticism Nasrallah had garnered from leaders and clerics across the region following the Hizballah-provoked violence in Lebanon in May 2008. For his part, Hariri said he needed to meet Nasrallah, because he does not have a militia to compete with Hizballah on the ground. He also believed the meeting would open doors for him with the Shia community, as his meeting with Ayatollah Sistani in Iraq earlier this year had done. Hariri reiterated that he was not changing his political alliances, nor was Hizballah, and that the meeting was not a negotiation on the elections. Nader Hariri said Nasrallah had told them the day of the meeting that it had been 835 days since the last Hariri-Nasrallah meeting. "I would have liked it to be 935," said Saad.

#### THE SYRIANS ARE "WIMPS"

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18. (S) Hariri launched into a discussion about Syria and the danger it poses to Lebanon. He said the Syrian regime felt threatened by Lebanon and Iraq, the democracies on either side of it, and so was working to undermine those. He claimed the only way to deal with Syria was to be tough, and he was delighted by the reports of a October 26 raid by U.S. forces into Syria. "If what happened in Syria (on October 26) happened on the 6th of May, there would have never been a 7th of May. If you had done this five years ago, Iraq would have been much easier. This is all they understand. They are wimps," said Hariri. He believed Syria would not take the issue to the UN Security Council, because they know they were harboring militants.

19. (S) Hariri believed it would be impossible to separate Syria from Iran. He noted that Syria was the only Arab country that supported Iran during the Iran-Iraq war, and

said that no type of "engagement" would succeed in pulling them apart. He said he thought the world would see a "different Syria" after the recent attack.

#### BRING BACK THE ARMISTICE?

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¶10. (S) A/S Hook noted that he had seen the new UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon, Michael Williams (Ref C), earlier in the day, and said the U.S. fully supports UN-led efforts on Shebaa Farms issues. Hariri was pessimistic about the prospects for the return of the occupied lands, but said that once the elections in the U.S. and Israel are over, it might be helpful to call for implementation of the 1949 armistice agreement between Lebanon and Israel, as mentioned in UNSCR ¶1701. While Lebanon's entering into peace negotiations with Israel would be impossible given the opposition of Hizballah, implementation of the armistice would corner Hizballah, he argued.

#### UNIFIL: "HOSTAGE TO HIZBALLAH"

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¶11. (S) Hook asked Hariri's thoughts on UNIFIL forces and the implementation of UNSCR 1701. "UNIFIL is a hostage to Hizballah, Iran, and Syria," he replied. "They have teeth but can't use them." He said UNIFIL has been intimidated by Hizballah, and because the European countries whose troops serve in UNIFIL are scared of putting them in harm's way, they have turned a blind eye to Hizballah's arms smuggling. He rejected UNIFIL reporting that "downplays" the flow of arms, saying it is clear Hizballah is rearming. He pointed out that currently, 75 percent of students in schools in south Lebanon are girls. The boys are in Hizballah training camps for military training, he said, which could not happen if there were no arms.

#### SPECIAL TRIBUNAL:

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#### HARIRI SUPPORTS UNIIIC'S DISCRETION

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¶12. (S) Hook said he had just signed off on the final U.S. disbursement to fund the UN Special Tribunal for Lebanon. He told Hariri that the USG strongly supports UNIIIC Commissioner Daniel Bellemare as he investigates the assassination of Hariri's father, former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri. Hariri said Bellemare was "very secretive." As A/S Hook explained Bellemare's desire to be as independent and apolitical as possible, Hariri interrupted, "I am with him! He should be secretive!"

#### UN INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

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¶13. (SBU) A/S Hook mentioned the UN Interfaith Dialogue to take place in New York in November. Hariri noted that President Sleiman was planning to attend, as well as the king of Saudi Arabia. He said Lebanon would like to host the new interfaith center the UN is establishing, but he feared it would lose out to Indonesia. (Note: We learned the following day that Lebanon has recently asked Saudi Arabia for additional demining funds. End Note.)

¶14. (U) A/S Hook has cleared this cable.

SISON